

to: **Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission**
from: Ed Zimmer
re: Agenda of July 24, 2008
date: July 18 , 2008

Item 2: Kaplan University (formerly Hamilton College, formerly Lincoln School of Commerce) has several applications pending before Planning Commission that require review and actions or recommendations by the Environs Commission. These items were introduced at the June 26th meeting.

- a) Demolition of dormitory at 1800 J Street. The dormitory is a three story, brown-brick building with minimal fenestration. District standards require submission of plans for reuse of sites to accompany requests for demolition. The loss of the dormitory is not detrimental to the Environs District, in the opinion of staff.
- b) Kaplan proposes to develop a parking lot at 18th and J on the dormitory location, expanding the existing parking lot east of the dormitory. The Commission's design standards state:

Design Standard 5: Parking Lots

Surface parking facing the Capitol Square or one of the Malls is inconsistent with the long-term goals of the Commission. Where such use currently exists, it is desirable to improve these properties by installing permanent, high-quality decorative fences, walls, or hedges at the defined "built-to" line, with due consideration for security and screening.

This location is atypical within the Environs District in that the "back" side of the block, in Environs District terms, is K Street—a much more prominent location in Lincoln's travel patterns than J Street. The Commission's long-term goal for J Street is an enhanced residential district near the Capitol. Whether expanding the existing parking lot, while enhancing its screening and landscaping, is preferable for the residential character of the area to the present dormitory building is a matter for the Commission's consideration.

The parking lot plan describes a "low wall with terraced landscaping in front," a low brick wall with fencing, and plantings of daylilies, pampas grass, burning bush, and locust trees, in addition to some areas of "sodded lawn" between the wall and the edge of the parking lot, and around the academic building.

An elevation detail or section detail would be useful to understand the proposed terraced landscaping, wall, and fence.

Staff recommendation: In general, removal of the dormitory and expansion (with enhancement) of the existing parking lot seems an overall improvement to this Environs property and acceptable under standards for enhanced parking lots described in **Standard 5**. The specific details of the plantings and architectural screening should be better described and reviewed by the Commission's members with expertise in these areas.

- c) East expansion of the Kaplan building.
This prominent building on K Street qualifies for the Commission's stated policy of reviewing major projects in concept one month, then taking action at a second monthly meeting.

The submitted elevations will probably be difficult to read in this packet. The .pdfs which have been provided to Planning Department will be on-line at <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/bdscom/ncec/agenda/index.htm> accompanying the June 26th and July 24th agendas.

The project includes a glass curtain-wall link between the existing building and a major addition to the east. The existing building would be modified with the addition of four "perforated metal screen...backlit by new wall fixture". Materials of the new building include blonde face brick with charcoal brick near the base, silver-colored composite metal panels on a curved feature, and aluminum window systems.

Relevant standards for reviewing the project include:

Design Standard 1: Setting

*The Capitol should **dominate** the District and other improvements in the area should play the important, **subordinate** role of providing its setting.*

I have added underscoring for emphasis to the standard perhaps most applicable to the project.

Design Standard 2: Proximity

The nearer a property is to the Capitol, the greater responsibility it bears in the District. Buildings and other improvements facing Capitol Square should meet very high standards for design, construction, and maintenance. Improvements facing the Capitol Malls (Centennial/north, Lincoln/west, south, and east) should also meet high standards. Other improvements within the District but not facing the Square or the Malls should not intrude upon the Capitol's setting and should contribute to the overall quality of the District.

As a whole, the Kaplan project appears to offer a significant investment in and improvement to one of the most prominent properties near the Capitol on the east leg of the Environs District.

Item 3, NSEA Building site development

I've just received and will enclose the site diagram for this project at S. 14th and Lincoln Mall. The Commission review and approved the building modifications at the Nov. 2007 meeting.